The scientific means used to investigate the sky have changed radically. Even though that romantic image of the astronomer eye-glued to the telescope is still lingers with many of us, in truth the observation methods have undergone profound technological changes closer to those affecting photography recordings. As a fact, if the image of heavenly bodies was once seized by emulsion plates, it is now recorded straight onto the telescope's CCD sensors, which can then be analysed by the astronomer on a de-localised computer screen. The main difference is a question of scale: a telescope altogether acts like a huge digital camera, the shooting distance can be measured accordingly to light-years and the photographed object is never quite present/current, but on a constant delay as to the observer.

In the attempt of experimenting the boundaries between photography, scientific image and computer science structure at the base of some data visualisation, every day Nightshifts publishes online all the pictures taken the night before by the Italian national telescope, Telescopio Nazionale Italiano Galileo, located at the Canary Islands. A server automatically feeds files in the FITS (Flexible Image Transport System) extension relative to the observations, it processes them achieving the telescope's images and the technical parameters at the time of each shot they contain, and then it assembles them into one film.
The quantity and type of each frame forming the film depend on the telescope's working programme and on the weather conditions, on a straight link allowing the visitors of the site to reconstruct the observatory's activity during the night and experience an unknown dimension of the starry sky, through images usually undisclosed to non-pros.

Compared to the astronomical shots taken from space telescopes which undergo massive touch-up work passed by media, Nightshift's images are featured by a somewhat everyday unspectacular dimension as though each one of them was an enigmatic starting point in a mysterious atlas forged by a maze of natural and technological signs leaving the viewer with a great sense of freedom.

Their appeal isn't as much in their abstract formal beauty, the scientific truth, the sci-fi film suggestion they imbue, the illusion of real time or in the rawness of numbers but in the absolutely contemporary tension between the cold rapid flawless flux of data and an opening towards nature, contemplation and knowledge suggested.

The long times of exposure, the complexity of mechanism, a sense of the unknown paradoxically recall the late 1800s discovery photography and seem to be a more anxious and insecure version of that same attempt to redefine the coordinates of human existence on this planet.

The site is divided in two parts. In the first part, Nightmovie, one can appreciate the whole footage of the images recorded the night before, pause on a particular image, examine its technical data, view enlargements of the heavenly bodies at close changing the brightness and then continue viewing the film. At any moment the viewer can shift to Nightsearch, the other part of the site, and browse a database which gradually collects and orders each individual frame. According to the most significant search keys – date, hour, image type, photographed object – one can view any photograph and start the footage of the relevant night. The project envisages a two-way high level controlled interaction: Platform gathers the theoretical devices and has been designed to be an open exchange and confrontation place for experts of the different disciplines and sectors that Nightshifts slightly touches upon, ranging from photography to astronomy up to contemporary art, to communication science and philosophy. The second and most ambitious interaction mode would be that of creating a network of observer of the same level worldwide, so as to follow the planet's movement through the astronomers' work at the most varied latitudes. A news letter will enable subscribers to be updated periodically on the project's status.